

# Jews and the Christian Conscience:

## A PLEA FOR PALESTINE

*An address by*

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# Jews and the Christian Conscience:

## A Plea for Palestine



AM TO SPEAK to you this morning on the problem of the Jew in relation to the Christian. Or, as I prefer to put it, the problem of the Christian in relation to the Jew! I would emphasize this latter phrasing of the question, since I propose to speak very particularly from the standpoint of what I call the Christian conscience. There are two reasons why I approach this problem in this way:

In the first place, it involves questions which invite the consideration not so much of sentiment or reason as of the simple fundamentals of right and wrong. The Christian treatment of the Jews is one of the outstanding crimes of all the ages. It is the supreme abomination of Christian history. If the Jews were guilty of all the charges ever brought against them, if they were the perpetrators of every crime upon the long calendar of crime, there would still be no slightest justification for the penalties visited upon them. As it is, they are a patient, long-suffering and heroic people, who, like their own Messiah, are "despised and rejected of men, wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." That's the reason why I insist that the Christian conscience is the only tribunal before which this case may be justly tried.

In the second place, the conscience involves a question of repentance and reparation. If we do wrong, then conscience teaches us to undo this wrong. If we inflict injury upon our

fellowmen, then conscience instructs us to do our utmost to make amends for this injury. That's the reason why I can never sit down in conference with a rabbi, but what I feel embarrassed and hesitant at the thought of what my people have done to his, and of what I ought to do to set things right. I never come into the presence of a Jew but what I feel like bowing down before him, and washing his feet with my tears of sorrow and humiliation. I never enter a synagogue without seeing its walls in flames, its windows broken, its altar defiled, its eternal light extinguished, and its Tables of the Law torn into fragments and scattered in the gutter, for that's what Christians have done to synagogues ever since the Emperor Constantine made the church the arbiter of destiny in our western world.

I can best express what I have in mind in this regard by referring to an analogy presented by the life of the great and saintly Albert Schweitzer. In 1905, Dr. Schweitzer was just entering upon a distinguished career as a theologian and musician. He was a professor of theology at the University of Strasbourg, a preacher of general European fame, an outstanding organist, and already the world's leading authority on the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. Then suddenly he gave it all up, devoted years to the study of medicine, and in 1913 went as a medical missionary to Lambarene, a little village in the French Congo, in the very heart of the African jungle. There he has remained ever since, ministering to the native inhabitants of the Dark Continent.

Two motives seem to have led to this great decision. On the one hand, there were the crying needs of the African tribesmen. We Europeans and Americans have at our disposal all the wonders of medical science, and "we take as a matter of course," says Dr. Schweitzer, "the incalculable

advantages which this gives to us." And all the while there are the myriads, especially among the dark peoples of the earth "who suffer from illness and pain just as much as we do, and have absolutely no means of fighting them." This is too much like Dives and Lazarus—and Dr. Schweitzer resolved that, so far as he was concerned, the dark Lazarus should no longer lie at the feet of the white Dives, to pick up the mere crumbs from his table.

Secondly, there was an overpowering sense of guilt in Dr. Schweitzer's heart as a white man in relation to colored men. This is the way he puts it: "Ever since the world's far-off lands were discovered, what has been the conduct of the white peoples to the colored ones? Who can describe the injustices and cruelties that, in the course of centuries, the colored peoples have suffered at the hands of Europeans? Who can measure the misery produced among them by the fiery drinks and the hideous diseases that we have taken to them. If a record could be compiled of all that has happened between the white and colored races, it would make a book containing pages which the reader would have to turn over unread, because their contents would be too horrible."

This is the spirit which took Schweitzer to Africa, and has held him there for over thirty years. "Not benevolence, but atonement!" is the way he puts it. "For every one who scattered injury among the colored people, some one else ought to go out to help, and when we have done all that it is in our power to do, we shall not have atoned for the thousandth part of our guilt."

Now, that's the way I feel about the Jews. I feel the same way, of course, about the Negroes. But just now I am talking about the Jews. And I am talking about them because an opportunity is offering itself for us to make some atonement for our sins committed against Israel. What I

have in mind, of course, is the plight of the Jews in Europe in this moment, and what we Christians can do about it.

I am not going to harrow your minds this morning with a recital in detail of the dreadful story of what the Jews have suffered since Hitler came to power. Suffice it to say that, of the six million Jews in Europe, outside of Russia, who were living before the Nazis began their campaign of extermination, something less than two million are now alive. The Nazis have destroyed, in other words, in their work of deliberate massacre, more than two-thirds of all the Jews living in Europe before 1933, and a quarter of the number of Jews living at that time in the entire world. No single nation, or group of people, has lost anything like this proportion of dead in this most ghastly single period in human history.

This toll of death should be sufficient to shame and horrify us with guilt, for Hitler is the product of our civilization, and his deeds are a part of the record we have written. But in addition there are the dreadful circumstances of torture and torment in which this work of extermination was carried on. For years the Jews were hunted like rats from corner to corner. They were shot down in the streets like so many mad dogs. They were burned alive in their homes and synagogues. They were starved to death in concentration camps. They were loaded into cattle cars in mid-winter, or marched barefooted for miles over frozen ground, to be conveyed to centers of wholesale slaughter. They were locked in freight cars or prison cells, and suffocated in the fetid stench of their own filth. They were gassed, electrocuted, vivisected, injected with poisons and disease germs, and machine-gunned by the side of open graves which they themselves had dug. If these Jews, men, women, and little children, were spared any refinement of



agony that vicious and sadistic minds could invent, I for one have never heard of it.

The wonder is that any son and daughter of Abraham survived at all. But they did, at least a million and a half of them! But these very survivors are now in a fair way to perish this coming winter, of cold, hunger, and disease. Some of them are reasonably safe, thank God, in England, France, Sweden, Switzerland, and many in Russia. But not less than 400,000 of them are the most wretched of refugees, bereft of home and country, stripped naked of all their money and property, without food, shelter or clothing, unable to return whence they came, unable to go they know not where, existing miserably in city slums or rural lanes, or tramping mile after mile, day after day, the eternal road of exile, and dreaming, as they have always dreamed, of Zion.

Of all the peoples in Europe today, there are none so wretched as these Jews. There are none who stand so near the threshold of doom and death. Yet their problem should be the simplest of all the problems of the world's stricken peoples in this dark hour. I have spoken of them as dreaming, as they have always dreamed, of Zion! Well, why shouldn't they go to Zion? Why shouldn't they be settled in Palestine? Why shouldn't this Promised Land be for these latest of the Children of Israel wandering through the desert wilderness of our shattered world, even as it was for the earliest of the Children of Israel wandering through the desert wilderness of Sinai? Let me tell you why Palestine belongs to the Jews, and why the Jews should be allowed to go there.

First of all, Palestine belongs to the Jews historically. It is the homeland of the Jews, even as Ireland is the homeland of the Irish, and Greece the homeland of the Greeks, and England the homeland of the English. It is true that

the Jews were not the first to settle in Palestine, any more than the Irish were the first to settle in Ireland, or the Greeks to settle in Greece, or the English to settle in England. But they were there in the earliest dawn of history, and they have remained there ever since. Thus, the land has been conquered again and again by Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and Turks, but the Jews themselves have never been conquered or destroyed. They have been driven into exile more than once, but some of them have always stayed behind, and the rest have always sooner or later returned. When Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus in 70 A.D., and the people of Israel scattered to the four winds, many thousands of them fled to the hills of Palestine, and there made their abode. When I visited Palestine in 1929, I climbed the mountains above the Sea of Galilee, and there found Safed, a Jewish town which dates back to the earliest years of the Christian era. When the Arabs conquered Palestine, more than 1200 years ago, the Jews were there, and under Arab and Turk alike they stayed there, to keep watch and ward above their own. Today, amid Moslem shrines, and Christian holy places, and British garrisons and forts, Palestine is still a Jewish country.

I repeat that Palestine belongs to the Jews. The stamp of their life and culture is indelibly upon it. Every highway bears the footprints of the ancient Jewish kings. Every village echoes with the cry of the ancient Jewish prophets. Every mountain, valley, river, and little brook, bears a name familiar to us from the reading of the Old Testament. I remember the day I rode on horseback up the valley of the Emek, to visit some of the remoter Jewish colonies. After an hour's ride through the pouring rain, we came to the first of the colonies, Ain Harod, and dismounted to inspect it. We visited the homes of the settlers, their schools



and assembly halls, the stables, the barns, the fields and pastures. Then the head of the colony took me down a little slope into the valley, as though he were taking me to some hidden treasure, and, suddenly stopping before a gushing spring, cried, "Look at that!" I looked without enthusiasm, for I was drenched with rain, wet through to the skin, and saw nothing particularly remarkable about flowing water. "Yes," I said, "I see it. But what about it?" The young Jew looked at me in amazement, then stretching out his hands, and half kneeling as though in prayer, exclaimed, "But this is the Well of Gideon." And my mind went racing back to the Old Testament, to the heroic story of Gideon and his men, and the spring which was central to the tale.

Let me tell you another story! We were visiting Haifa; and after inspecting the town, we climbed to the hills overlooking the harbor. I wanted to see the great engineering works which were then making Haifa one of the leading seaports of the Eastern Mediterranean. I wanted also to visit the Tomb of Abdul Baha, the great prophet of Bahaism, which was there upon the slope. I was standing by the tomb under the lordly cedars, and gazing upon the glorious panorama at my feet, when my guide said to me: "Do you know where you are?" I said, "Yes, in Haifa." "But this hill here, where we are standing?" he continued. "What hill is it?" I said. "Why," he answered, "this is Mount Carmel, where the prophet Elijah confounded and destroyed the prophets of Baal."

I was standing one day on the summit of Mount Scopus, with Judah Magnes, the Chancellor of the Hebrew University which crowns this hill. We were looking to the north and east, and Magnes, suddenly pointing to the horizon, said, "Do you see that little dark spot over there?"

I looked intently, but saw nothing. Then he said, "Right under that hill there—the little dark spot." I looked again, and saw at last what he was pointing at. "That little spot," said Magnes, "is the village of Anathoth, where the prophet Jeremiah was born. And that highway there, running to the west and joining the main highway north and south to Damascus—that's the road over which Jeremiah traveled when he came here to Jerusalem to speak as a prophet of the Lord."

This is what I mean when I say that Palestine belongs to the Jews historically. They have molded it by the power of their spirit. They have created it out of the vision of their souls. They have stamped it indelibly with the imprint of their genius. As Palestine was theirs yesterday, so it is theirs today, and so it will remain forever.

Secondly, Palestine belongs to the Jews legally. It has been given to them, in our time, by every solemn pledge and official action of government. Thus, in 1917, Great Britain, the conqueror of the Turks, issued the famous Balfour Declaration, which set forth that "His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object." Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, and General Smuts have all agreed, and so stated, that the intention of those who framed this Declaration was to afford the Jews the opportunity to establish in Palestine a Jewish commonwealth.

In 1919, President Wilson confirmed this interpretation of the Balfour Declaration, and America's interest in its fulfillment, when he said that, "The Allied nations, with the fullest concurrence of our government and people, are agreed that in Palestine shall be laid the federation of a Jewish commonwealth."

In 1920, at San Remo, the Allied Supreme Council allotted the Mandate for Palestine, under the League of Nations, to Great Britain, "for the express purpose of putting the Balfour Declaration into effect."

In 1924, the terms of the Mandate were formally ratified by the Treaty of December 3rd, between Great Britain and the United States, in the interest, among other things, of the establishment of the Jewish commonwealth in Palestine.

And the Arabs consented to all this! Thus, Sir Henry McMahon, who negotiated for Great Britain the independent Kingdom of Arabia, has testified that "it was not intended to include Palestine in the area of Arab independence." Palestine, in other words, was excluded from the new Arab Kingdom—and the Arabs knew it, and agreed. Furthermore, there is the famous statement of Emir Feisal, of Hedjaz, the great Arab leader of the time. He it was who said, "We Arabs look with deepest sympathy on the Zionist movement, and we will do our best to help it."

Thus has Palestine in our time been formally and officially given to the Jews, for the reestablishment of their ancient home. It can be withheld from them, and closed to their stricken people, only by the most indecent repudiation of contracts signed and sealed.

Lastly, Palestine belongs to the Jews by virtue of what they have done there in the settlement of a desert, and the cultivation of a wasted land.

It is easily forgotten these days that Jewish colonists went to Palestine more than sixty years ago, before the present Zionist era began at all. These earliest colonists were refugees from Russia, and the awful pogroms of the Czar in 1881. They entered Palestine with the beneficent help of Baron Rothschild—hence the name, to this day, of

the "Rothschild Colonies"—and with the glad consent alike of Arab and of Turk. Since that time, two full generations ago, an ever-increasing flood of Jews has poured into the Promised Land. There, year in and year out, they have labored on the soil, watering it literally with their sweat and tears and blood; and it is a moderate statement of the facts to say that they have made the desert to blossom as the rose.

I have myself been in Palestine, as I have told you more than once this morning, and I have seen large portions of the desolate countryside in its primitive condition of a thousand years of Arab neglect. Nothing but the dry and empty sand! Not a single blade of grass, not a tree springing from the soil, not a spring or well, or flowing brook! A land as desert as the Sahara itself! And then I have seen this land in the places where the Jewish colonists have been at work. The flowing springs, the cool wells driven deep into the ground, the overflowing reservoirs of fresh sweet water, the irrigation pipes and ditches running for miles out into the countryside, the rich pasture lands, the fertile fields and gardens, the olive trees, the orange groves, the vineyards—and, in appropriate places, the great industries developed by the Jews in recent years. It is a wonderful sight—I know of nothing quite to compare with it in all the world. And it is the handiwork of the Jews! And I want to say that a land, thus recreated and redeemed, thus made to live again out of very death itself, belongs by every human and divine right to those who have loved it, nurtured it, beautified it, enriched it, labored, suffered, and died for it.

Thus is Palestine the homeland of the Jews. It is such by historical tradition, by legal status, by creative toil. And it is this Palestine, let me remind you, which is the one country on the surface of the globe today from which Jews

are excluded for no other reason than that they are *Jews*. I know of no more ironical fact than this. Other people can go to Palestine, but not Jews. Jews can come here to America as natives of Germany, or France, or England, if the immigration quota be not exhausted. But Jews as such can't go to Palestine, for this land which belongs to them is now, under the infamous White Paper, closed to them. "No Admittance", to Jews! Where, even in the tales of the ancient Pharaohs, or of the modern Hitler, can you find anything quite to compare with this? A homeland closed to those who love it, and would cherish it forever!

But what about the Arabs? Yes, what about the Arabs? This is the question always asked. This is the challenge always flung in Israel's face. Well, what about the Arabs?

Are the Arabs being driven out of Palestine? On the contrary, there are more Arabs in Palestine today than ever before in the whole history of the Arab occupation. The Arabs are multiplying amazingly in this land which fosters their life and protects their interests. When I was in Palestine, sixteen years ago, the Arab population at that time, according to the government census, was in round numbers 557,000. There are now in Palestine not less than 1,200,000 Arabs. In a period of half a generation, in other words, the number of Arabs in this country has something more than doubled. The Arabs not only have a high birth-rate, but they have discovered that in Palestine is a fruitful garden set down in the midst of a desert, and they flock to it as bees to flowers.

Are the Arabs being impoverished and exploited by the Jews in Palestine? On the contrary, the Palestinian Arabs were never more prosperous, healthy, and happy than they are today. The Jews have lifted the whole standard of living for the Arabs. They work with them on the land



and share with them the produce of the soil. They employ them on the railroads and in the industries, and pay them good wages. They build homes and villages for them near the colonies. They open their schools to the Arab children, and their health centers to the whole Arab population. Never in all their history have the Arabs known any such experience as this. At one stroke they have been lifted out of centuries of degradation and placed on the high levels of modern life.

Are the Arabs hostile to the Jews? Do they want to get rid of them? The idea that they are, and do, is one of the supreme propaganda myths of our time. For the great masses of the Arab people in Palestine are living with the Jews, working with them, sharing the fertility of the country with them, and rejoicing that they have come. The Jews from the beginning have made friends with the Arabs, and the Arabs from the beginning have responded. If left alone, without outside interference, the Arabs and the Jews in Palestine would be a united people, and there would be no trouble of any kind. Let me tell you three stories, in illustration of what I am saying:

In my travels in Palestine, I visited one of the older Jewish colonies, Petah Tikvah, a great center of the orange industry. I walked happily through the orange groves, and in the midst of them found a kind of storage building in which the golden fruit was placed as it was plucked. In this building were some thirty or more young men and women, boys and girls, sorting out the oranges, large ones in this pile, medium sized ones in this other pile, and so on. These youthful workers, I was told, were some of them Jews and some of them Arabs. They were a happy lot, working together with smiling faces and eager voices. I was asked if I could distinguish the Jews from the Arabs, and when I tried to do so, failed pretty completely. They



were dressed and looked alike. Suddenly one of the boys asked me if I would like to hear them sing, and I said that I certainly would. And immediately those Jewish and Arab young people, with one glad accord, dropped their work, gathered together, and began to sing the folk-songs of the countryside. They were not so much Jewish songs or Arab songs as Palestinian songs, the common possession of these two peoples, symbolic of their common life and common destiny. It was a deeply moving experience.

Some six months after my visit, there came the dreadful riots and massacres of August, 1929. I was horrified here in America, and could not understand how Arabs could thus murder Jews. Some months later a visitor from Palestine, one of the colonists, came to this country to raise money, and I talked with him about the outbreaks, and I said: "I don't understand the Arabs rising up against the Jews in this fashion." And he replied, "The Arabs in Palestine weren't guilty of these dreadful acts. Not a bit of it! Those responsible for the massacres, the big fellows at the top, had to bring in Arabs from outside, Arabs who had never seen a Jew in their lives, to accomplish the bloody work. The Arabs in Palestine fought for their Jewish comrades, and did their utmost to defend them."

One more incident, and this a very recent one! Some ten days ago I read a little dispatch from London in the *New York Times*, to the effect that a trade commission had just arrived in England from Palestine to discuss the export of oranges from the homeland. Conditions were not good, and Palestine wanted the help of the government authorities. At the end of the dispatch appeared a single sentence, profoundly significant, to the effect that half of the commission was composed of Arabs, and the other half of Jews.

In other words, these Jews and Arabs, representatives of their common country, had traveled together over thousands of miles to England, and there in London were working together in the interest of one another.

These incidents are significant because they are typical. They constitute a complete answer to the charge that Jews and Arabs hate one another and are fighting to destroy one another. On the contrary, they are friends and allies in meeting together the troubles which a troubled world is forcing upon them. For there *is* trouble! And where does this trouble come from?

First, from the Arab overlords—the rich Arab families living in Jerusalem, Cairo, Rome, Paris, and London. In order to understand the situation, we must remember that the Arab civilization is a feudal civilization. At the top of society are the overlords, or barons, who own the land and the miserable serfs who toil on the land. For centuries, these overlords have exploited the *felaheen*, as they are called—the Arab peasants who are the most wretched human beings upon whom my eyes have ever rested. Their poverty is indescribable. Their ignorance, superstition and dirt unbelievable. The hopeless and helpless victims of their feudal masters, who have ruled them and robbed them in the natural working of an established social system. Now have come the Jews—and the Arab overlords behold with horror the progressive emancipation of their serfs. The Jews have made common cause with these Arabs on the land. They have brought to them the standards of our western life, and raised them to the levels of our western economy. For the first time the Arab workers are getting an income of their own, gaining an education, enjoying sanitary and medical care, being led out from darkness into light. If this process goes on, as the overlords know perfectly well, it

means an end to the long-established feudal system of political mastery and economic exploitation. So they hate the Jews, and are resolved to destroy them, and have pledged a holy war against them. When you hear about Arab hostility to the Jews, ask "What Arabs?" And you will find invariably that it is these few and powerful Arabs at the top who would wreck Zion to save themselves.

Secondly, the trouble in Palestine comes from the British imperialists. A prime source of all the difficulties is the British Empire, which occupies Palestine in its own interest and for the sake of its own advantage. The story in Palestine is the same as the story of British rule in other portions of the world. For surely you must have noted that wherever Britain rules a subject people, that people straightway becomes divided within itself, and thus the easy prey of imperial control. The British were in Ireland for 600 years, and during all that time the Irish Catholics could not get along with the Irish Protestants. Catholics and Protestants got along fairly well everywhere else in the world, but not in Ireland. What's the trouble in India? Trouble between Hindus and Moslems, so we are informed. But Hindus and Moslems in India got along all right before Britain appeared upon the scene, and if Britain withdrew from India tomorrow, Moslems and Hindus would straightway unite in the common service of their native land. In Palestine it is the same story—Arabs against Jews, and Jews against Arabs. The old imperial principle—"divide and rule!" To set a population at loggerheads, that's the way to root fast the Empire. None know this better today than the British, as none knew it better yesterday than the Romans. There can be no hope for Palestine, there will be no peace within its borders, until Britain is gone, and Jews and Arabs are free to work out together their common destiny.

Lastly, there is the trouble that comes from the Fascists in Palestine, as throughout all of the Near East today. The Fascists have been at work there for many years—I found them there as long ago as 1929. Everywhere they were sowing anti-Semitism—the fatal seeds of lust and hate that yield the ultimate harvest of tears and blood. Insofar as the great masses of the Arab people are in any way hostile to the Jews, it is because of the anti-Semitism with which they have been infected as other peoples in other portions of the world have similarly been infected. This foul influence of Fascism must be burnt and purged away, if the Near East is to be saved from fresh disaster.

These are the sources of trouble in Palestine—the Arab overlords, the British imperialists, and the Fascists. What can we do against them? How can we overcome them?

First, we can use the influence of this great country to secure the abrogation of the White Paper, and thus to open the gates of Palestine to the Jewish refugees of Europe. We can begin by supporting President Truman in his demand that immediately not less than 100,000 European Jews be received into the Holy Land. One word from America, and this would be done. One little suggestion that not another dollar would be loaned to Britain until justice had been done to the Jews, and the gates of Palestine will be flung wide to all who would enter in.

Secondly, we must do everything that lies within our power to end the British Mandate in Palestine. It has been grossly misused. As long as it holds, it will be made to serve the interests of Britain and not of Zion. It should be ended forthwith, and in its place established an international trusteeship of Palestine, perhaps under the United Nations Organization.

Lastly, we can make a direct approach to the Arab people, to the end of securing definite and formal cooperation between them and the Jews. It is the testimony of no less a man than Dr. Judah Magnes that the time is ripe for this cooperation. Left alone by themselves, and backed by the friendly sanction of world opinion, the Arab and Jewish peoples could be trusted to work out their own problems, and establish firm and sure their own mutual interests. This problem is not impossible of solution. It is as simple as common sense, and as easy as good will.

In closing I return to the point at which I started—the thought of atonement dictated by the Christian conscience in relation to the Jews. Palestine offers us our golden opportunity. Now is the chance, in securing Palestine forever to the Jews, to offer penitence and reparation for our sins.

I remember the day when I was leaving Jerusalem, and having a farewell talk with a distinguished Jewish editor. As we were saying goodbye, I asked him if there was anything I could do for him on my travels home, or in America. He said, Yes, there was something I could do for him in Rome. "What is it?" I asked. Then he told me the story of his visit to Rome, some years earlier, when he had met Mussolini. In parting, the Italian Duce had asked him if he could do him any favor. And the gallant son of Israel replied: "Yes, there is one thing you can do. You can take down the Arch of Titus, stone by stone, and give it to the Jews, to be erected again upon Mt. Zion."

Was the editor suggesting that I should see Mussolini, and ask again for him that the Arch be taken to Jerusalem? I told him laughingly that I was scarcely the man to do this, and Mussolini scarcely the man to respond. So the Arch still stands in the ancient Forum. But the editor's thought of its removal may well serve as a symbol of the redemption owed by Christendom to Israel.

